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STATE FOR A/S BOUCHER AND SCA/INS, USPACOM FOR FPA

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [CE](#)
SUBJECT: AKASHI READOUT OF VISIT TO COLOMBO

REF: TOKYO 90

Classified By: Ambassador Robert O. Blake, Jr. for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: In a briefing for the Co-Chair and Indian Ambassadors on January 15, Japanese Special Envoy Yasushi Akashi reported that he conveyed to President Rajapaksa and other interlocutors Japan's deep concern about the abrogation of the cease-fire and the likelihood of intensified hostilities between the GSL and the LTTE. Based on his talks, Akashi agreed that the GSL is likely to intensify military pressure on the LTTE as much as possible until the human or economic consequences force a change in the current strong public support for such a campaign. He also concurred that the GSL is unlikely to seek to resume peace talks until the military option has been exhausted. Akashi told the GSL privately that if there is an escalation of fighting there may/may be some consequences for Japanese cooperation. Co-Chair Ambassadors agreed that while the GSL was not likely to grant access to Co-Chair representatives to Kilinochchi during this phase of intensified conflict, Co-Chair countries should press the GSL to allow regular access to LTTE controlled areas for the local heads of UN agencies such as UNICEF and UNHCR, as previous governments have during periods of conflict. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Akashi explained that the purpose of his visit was to convey Japan's deep concern about the abrogation of the cease-fire and the likelihood of intensified hostilities between the GSL and the LTTE. He met with the President, Prime Minister, Foreign Minister, Members of Parliament from the Tamil National Alliance and (separately) the JVP, and the Ministers of Trade, Tourism and Administration, who crossed over to the Government from the opposition UNP in 2007.

Priority for Military Action Over Negotiations

¶3. (C) Akashi heard sometimes conflicting messages about the Government's intentions. The President told him the GSL remains committed to a negotiated settlement without providing details. The crossover Ministers, who met with Akashi as a group, were more "fatalistic" in their assessment that the GSL will take military action as far as possible. In what Akashi characterized as a long and serious discussion, the President's brother and chief political

advisor Basil Rajapaksa told Akashi the GSL still believes in talking to the LTTE but "to be persuasive, the GSL must use military pressure."

¶4. (C) Opposition Leader Wickremesinghe told him that the GSL is underestimating the LTTE's residual military capability. Akashi expressed concern about the "dire" human consequences that are likely to result from increased conflict. Akashi said the presence and role of the Co-Chair Ambassadors remain important. He urged the Ambassadors to encourage the President to exert greater leadership.

¶5. (C) The Norwegian Ambassador asked if there was any clarity on Government thinking about when they might seek to engage the LTTE in negotiations. Akashi said it was not clear from his talks when the government might do so. He said Basil Rajapaksa had discussed Government plans to present a modest peace proposal to the LTTE at a stage to be determined. Government negotiators would have authority to expand the package, so that the LTTE negotiators would be able to claim credit and results as a consequence of the talks.

¶6. (C) The Indian Ambassador commented that once the Government embarks on a military escalation, that will feed nationalistic sentiments which will make it difficult for the government to halt fighting to start negotiations. Akashi responded that the already high level of inflation and mounting military casualties will balance to some extent such nationalistic feelings.

¶7. (C) Ambassador asked Akashi about the conflicting reports in the press of what Akashi had told the government about Japanese assistance. Akashi lamented the distorted and contradictory reports that had appeared in the Sri Lankan press. He clarified that his private message to the government had been that if there is an escalation of fighting there may/may be some consequences for Japanese cooperation. He commented that Japan has avoided imposing linkages and conditionality, adding that donors should not punish the Sri Lankan people for the GSL's failure to achieve progress on issues of concern.

What Role for the Co-Chairs?

¶8. (C) The French Ambassador speaking on behalf of the Slovenian EU Presidency told Akashi that the EU is rethinking the role of the Co-Chairs in light of the CFA abrogation. The EU would communicate its ideas at a later stage. Akashi politely but firmly reminded the Ambassador that the existence of the Co-Chairs is tied not to the CFA but to the Tokyo Donor Conference in 2003.

¶9. (C) With respect to the request in the Co-Chair public statement of January 12 for Co-Chair access to Kilinochchi, Akashi said that the topic had only come up in his meeting with Basil Rajapaksa. He said that Basil seemed amenable, but made no specific commitments. The EU Head of Mission expressed doubt that any Co-Chair representatives would be given access while the Government intensifies its military campaign. He argued, however, that the Co-Chairs should support strongly the request by the local heads of UN agencies such as UNICEF and UNHCR for regular access to LTTE controlled areas. He said that previous governments had allowed such access during periods of conflict, so the present government should be strongly encouraged to follow that precedent. Akashi and the other Ambassadors agreed with that recommendation.

Co-Chairs Should not be Smokescreen for Military Action

¶10. (C) The Ambassador cautioned that the Co-Chairs should be under no illusion that the GSL will seek to resume talks with the LTTE anytime soon. Buoyed by its success in expelling the LTTE from the east and by strong public support for further military action in the north, the Government is

likely to intensify its campaign against the LTTE in the LTTE-controlled areas of the north. It will only stop when the human or economic consequences become too high and public sentiment supports a return to negotiations. The Government may implement unilaterally some elements of its devolution proposals, but it is not likely to negotiate with the LTTE until they have pushed a military solution as far as possible. The Government has a strong interest in keeping the Norwegian facilitator and the Co-chairs so they can tell the international community it remains committed to a negotiated settlement while it pursues its military agenda. The Co-Chairs should not, the Ambassador concluded, allow themselves to serve as cover in this way. Akashi responded that he agreed with the Ambassador's assessment and with the notion that we should not allow ourselves to be "a smokescreen for the Government's military agenda."

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